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# AT THE FRONT

## TWO LETTERS FROM FRANCE

(EDITOR'S NOTE:—Although John W. Beattie, of Grand Rapids, Mich., and Duncan McKenzie, of Montreal, Canada, whom we have not seen since the 1917 Conference in Grand Rapids, did not have publication of their letters in mind when they wrote the Editor these personal observations, he thought them so illuminating that he is sharing them with the readers of the Journal. If any of you have material bearing on music and the war the editor would appreciate the opportunity of examining it with a view to publication.—P. W. D.)

U. S. A. P. O. 722.

July 15th, 1918.

Dear Peter:—

I have had it on my mind to write you for a long time but have let it slide because I wanted to wait till I had time for a real, respectable letter. My usual kind have to be very short and most of my correspondence is done through postal cards. I have been laid up for two weeks now with a badly sprained ankle and several other minor bumps and scratches as a result of an accident. I was traveling to a neighboring Camp in company with three officers. The trip was being made in a Ford which had no top or sides and when a cow jumped out from behind a hedge and disputed the right of way with us there was nothing to hang on to so I got a bad spill. The Ford and cow were uninjured. I have had more time for letters than usual so will start one on to you. Perhaps I shall finish it all at one sitting and perhaps not. At any rate here goes.

I might say first that I do not blame you for harboring a suspicion that a perfectly good song leader was wasting his efforts in the sort of work that I wrote the Conference about. That is, to you people so many thousands of miles away, it might have seemed that whatever ability I possess could have been put to better use. You cannot realize, however, what the Y. M. C. A. workers are up against in some areas. There are so many things to be done that we do not feel like balking just because we happen to be preachers, lawyers, big business men or mere musicians. If you think that it may have gone against my grain to do all the physical labor that I spoke of you can imagine that it must require some sort of mental revolution for a pious clergyman to sell chewing tobacco and what not on the Sabbath. Hundreds of them are doing it without a murmur. There are simply things which must be done and we try to be "good soldiers."

I must confess though that I was glad to get away from my first station as I was not permitted to do many things in an entertainment line which seemed advisable to me. Not being as pious as our head man I was continually in hot water because what seemed like a good idea to me would be promptly squelched. So I pulled up stakes about the first of May and went in for a transfer. I had a delightful time in Paris, saw many of the famous places (most of them from the outside only) strolled for hours up and down the drives and boulevards, went to the opera as many times as there were performances and in general had a great time.

I happened onto the head man of this district at lunch one day and as he was looking for an entertainment man who would go ahead and do things without any advice I hit it off with him at once. This Camp is located in almost the center of the country, among very beautiful hills 3,000 feet above sea level. The climate is wonderful and the surroundings inspiring. We have the most beautiful sunsets I have ever seen. It does not get very hot either which adds to the pleasure of being here.

I have no other job than that of arranging entertainment for the men. It has become so easy that I am almost ashamed of myself at times and yet the boss says that he is satisfied to have me loaf all day if I want to so long as I can

deliver the goods in the evening. I have been able to do some first rate work here in the "gang singing" line. The men who were here when I first arrived were from the west and loved to sing. I have worked as long as forty minutes without anybody getting tired and believe me when these men do not like the entertainment provided they are not backward in expressing themselves. We have a very fair pamphlet containing the words of songs which the men are thought to know. Then whenever I could get hold of any new material I taught that. I soon picked up a dandy quartet and a "rag picker" who was a genius so we were all set for business. There was hardly a night that we did not do some singing. Another favorite stunt of mine is to get somebody at the piano for the movies and have the men sing as they watch the pictures. They will enjoy that kind of show for a solid hour and half.

About the time that I got on real good terms with this lot of men they left. The new outfit had a great many entertainers but being from the south they were not the singers that the other men were. I believe it only goes to show that people learn to love singing in school and we all know that the south has been behind the rest of the country in school music. I succeeded pretty well with them at that and we have had some wonderful shows.

You would laugh to see some of the stuff that I get up for the men. But I take this entertainment business very seriously. It seems to me the most important thing that the Y. is doing or can do. When the men have worked as hard all day as they are obliged to they need relaxation, not uplift. The Lord knows these boys from America are the cleanest soldiers in the world and do not need some one around every minute trying to improve their morals. Wine and women are of course a temptation to some men but if the Y. can furnish adequate opposition to these things the men will go to the Y. They will not go to be preached at or lectured to. So that is why I have tried so hard to furnish plenty of clean fun. The best of them is a fake hypnotic act. We had a fellow who was so good at this job that nine-tenths of the audiences believed he was pulling the real thing. He had a number of clever confederates. Then we have faked mind reading and ventriloquist acts too. I have not the slightest compunction about using anything which will give the men a good laugh. Of course the old time minstrel show is the most popular form of amusement in an Army Camp because it is the easiest to put on. It gives the men a chance to take a back handed swipe at their officers too and they all enjoy that. Many of the shows have to be put on without any rehearsal at all so you can see that a minstrel is a good, handy type of show. We gave one on Fourth of July evening after the speeches and it was witnessed by several thousand men and officers. It was given out doors and made such a hit that we had to repeat it twice in Camp and then were sent by the General to a Camp 70 miles from here to give two performances. The men had the time of their lives on this trip which was made in two large trucks and which I am told was the longest trip yet made in France by Army entertainers. Every once in a while we would stop at some village along the way and sing a few American songs for the natives. This made a great hit and especially so because there is an ever growing spirit of friendship between the French and Americans.

When I get back and have a lot of time I should like to tell you how I have changed on the popular song question. When I started across my acquaintance with music of a type that soldiers like was very limited. "Keep the home fires burning," "Pack up your troubles" and one or two others of that nature were my only stock in trade. I soon found that it was going to be necessary to enlarge my repertoire and proceeded to do so. My only trouble now is to get enough new songs. I think I understand in some manner why the so-called popular song is so much liked by Americans. Putting aside all talk about lack of appreciation of the better music I think there must be another reason for the popular hit. I have talked with men in the Army who are real musicians and who in civil life are members of such choral bodies as Stokowskis chorus in Philadelphia. They

all tell me the same story, that in the Army they do not want the music that stirs the emotions or stimulates the imagination but rather a rollicking sort of rhythmic ditty which makes them forget themselves. To be sure, certain songs of a sentimental nature such as "Perfect Day," "Mother Machree," "Sunshine of your smile" will always please the men. Some of these they will sing very well in concert though ordinarily the march song goes better. The most successful song I have used however is "Back Home Again In Indiana." It seems to appeal to the men much in the same way as the Foster songs and while you highbrows may condemn it as a silly sentimental thing you would revise your opinion of it if you could see the transformation that comes over the men's faces as they sing it. I have gotten so I like it as well as the soldiers. But to get back where I started, the soldier wants relaxation and he can get it from the cheap ten cent store song about as well as from anything else. Perhaps the same need exists in the lives of people anywhere who are obliged to work hard all day. Or the old stock reason of lack of appreciative ability may be the right one after all. But at any rate I shall never make fun of trivial songs again. I have seen too much of what they can do.

I find that "kiddies" are the same the world over. I go to a village near here quite frequently and always have a crowd of youngsters about me in no time, boys and girls. At first they came to ask for pennies and tobacco (the boys begin to smoke soon after they are out of the cradle) but as I began to get acquainted with them they wanted to show me French games and sing songs. The French marching song "Quand Madelon" is the boys' favorite and it pleases them greatly to have me sing it with them in my poor French. I have taught them several of our songs but the one they like best is "Good night ladies". The r's in "Merrily we roll along" seem to tickle them. I have had the pleasure of visiting the primary school several times but not the higher schools as there are none very near here. A group of 12-year-old pupils, boys and girls, sang for me a half hour one day. Their voices were of a lovely quality, though a trifle strained, and a few of the boys carried an excellent alto. It was all done by rote and the music was characteristic French songs. When I told the old professor how well I thought they had done he replied: "Yes, for you they sing like angels but not always for me the same." How like American youngsters.

Well, old fellow, some more of you songsters better get over here to counteract my evil influence. I am giving the men what they want or trying to. I do not think I will suffer any permanent injury in the process and I must say that I am convinced that I am doing some little good. It is going to be hard for me to get down to my old job again but I hope I may have broadened a little in some ways if not in a musical sense.

Cordially yours,

JOHN W. BEATTIE.

Permanent France address: Y. M. C. A. 12 Rue d' Aguesseau, Paris.

Y. M. C. A. LA COURTINE.

PROGRAM FOR WEEK OF JULY 15.

Monday Evening. 7:00 and 8:30. Anthoni and Bob. French Eccentric Musicians.

Tuesday Evening. Selections by 319th Band. 7:00 and 8:30. Russell Wilson, Buck and Wing Dancer. Smith and Howe, Piano and Drums. Sgt. Scarmolin, Concert Pianist. Three Reels of Pictures.

Wednesday Evening. Selections by F. A. R. R. Band. 7:00 and 8:30. Five Reel Feature. "The Truth Wagon".

Thursday Evening. Selections by 321st Band. 7:00 and 8:30. Big Time Vaudeville Show.

Friday Evening. Selections by 320th Band. 7:00 and 8:30. Movies.

Saturday Evening. Selections by 319th Band. 7:00 and 8:30. Concert by "Four Aces". Princeton Univ. Quartette.

The above will give you an idea of what sort of programs we are able

to give. The Monday and Saturday attractions are sent out by our Paris headquarters. We usually get one program from them every other week. They seem to be getting more generous. Take a look at Tuesday evening's program and then cuss me for being a bum program maker. Let me say in self-defense that we are forced to take a talent wherever and whenever we can get it. This boy, Scarmolin is a very fine pianist and something of a composer. He has quite a number of things, mostly for piano, published by Boosey. He is one of the best accompanists I have met anywhere. Have you ever used his song "We'll Keep Old Glory Flying"? It is a good Camp song or could be used to advantage in patriotic campaigns of any kind. Published by Boosey.

(BEATTIE)

France, 13, 7, '18.

Dear Dykema:

I have just heard the first music since I came out to France,—now four months. It was a fairly good Canadian Infantry band, playing selections from the popular London musical plays, opera excerpts, some intermezzos, etc., but what the crowd enjoyed most was an arrangement of some of the old favorite plantation melodies—Old Folks at Home, Old Black Joe, Carry Me Back, etc. Each one in the audience seemed inclined to sing. This selection was the first one to wake the audience up and keep it quiet and make it listen. It was the first selection to get the encore—which happened to be a one step or some kind of rag, which tickled the audience, on account of what the slide trombone had to do.

A New York organist, Williams by name, said to me it was as if he were at the grandest symphony concert. I was sitting in an estaminet (lunch room) and I had to come out when I heard the band. It soon brought a crowd. Even a bunch of officers soon congregated. The crowd were good listeners. There was an atmosphere of appreciation, pleasure and refreshment, and a touch of memories and home which I'm sure was in every one's mind. The one-step got some of the boys dancing for a little, only to stop and listen. Band music calls forth rhythmical actions and movements in us. Rhythm is primitive even in man, until he is self-conscious. These are just my observations while they are fresh. As for my own I was too busy analyzing the crowd. I'm analyzing and criticizing inwardly all the time. Musically I'm dead.

Another night I will write on the grampophone "in action" and "on rest." At present we are on rest, and have been three weeks down the line. We are expecting to go up the line any day now. We are living in barns, sleeping on straw. Now we are on the ground, the sanitary squad having taken the straw away and all that it contains. Though the ground is cold, it is preferable to the straw we had.

Our rest has consisted of open warfare maneuvers daily, moving the whole battery guns, stores, ammunition and all our motor lorries to two positions a day. The other time is spent on shining brass and then as you please.

The main source of enjoyment is the estaminet where you can get French beer, light wines and eggs and chips. I am a mere automaton. I can't concentrate to read. All I read is the daily papers, some weekly papers, and two monthly musical magazines. I enjoy writing letters to receiving them. Lots of the boys play cards. I don't, as I don't care for them. We have lots of gambling games, which I have never participated in, I wonder why? Probably because I'm Scotch.

The position we left last was considered a hot one and Fritzie shelled it regularly and well, but all around us, and only swept over our positions for ten days on end, getting fortunately few casualties and no gain.

There is one class of music that is tabooed by the soldiers as a whole, and yet is found necessary for contrast. It is called "sob" music, that is beautiful legato and artistic tone, in playing or singing. Still it grows on them as the record becomes known.

I certainly have enough sense to take all the cover I can get when I hear Fritzies coming. I suppose I have had close calls, but "a miss is as good as a hit" for me, transposing the proverb. We got gas too. I don't like that. That does make you windy. And I don't like directing ammunition lorries with 5,000 pounds of H. E. on each to the guns, when he's shelling around the position. So far I am not as windy as I would expect a musician to be, but it's an unpleasant thing to be in a gun pit when shells are dropping and you've got *one* windy man around you.

My letter writing is not in any way thought out. I ramble on and I do it for I know I'll get a letter in return. One has to work for his mail in France. Then it's a pleasant way of putting in the time. At present I am writing in a French village school beside our barn at 9:00 p. m. on a beautiful evening, with birds chirping in the trees outside.

*The Gramophone at the Front.*

We took two with us. Our V. C. chose the records. He is an egoist in everything and his choice of records showed his type of mind. However that's by the way.

One of my most vivid impressions was on going into a gun pit one day when we were not firing. One fellow was working the gramophone. The rest of the crew were lying and sitting around the pit. The sun was shining down on the Camouflage over the pit. No one was talking; some were half sleeping and some trying to read. All were listening without talking. I broke the silence to go in and count ammunition—my job, but I sat down too. The whole impression was sacred and beautiful. Any minute the word might come over the wall "Action." This same gun crew had the gramophone going at spells during the night when they were not in action.

Another impression, and a vivid one too, was in an old tunnel, one of Fritzies', 30 feet below the ground. We had been chased in during the evening sooner than we expected by an attack of gas shells. The beds were arranged berth-wise in two tiers all along the tunnel, lit up by candles, and looking more like a cloister in a monastery than anything else. The orderly office of the telephone exchange was in a little room off one end of the tunnel. Some fellows were in bed. I happened to be. The gramophone was in the office. The telephonists had connected up as many stations as possible and a receiver was hung over the sounding board of the instrument. The telephonists at both sections of our crew were connected up, also the telephonist at the chief O. P., and also our telephonists' dug out, where the off-duty men were. We could hear the dull noise of the gas shells and something of the rumbling of upturned earth when a shell dropped on or near our trench. The whole impression was pathetic. The fellows would sometimes sing or snap their fingers in response to a rhythm. The gramophone goes the round of the different gun crews and no team likes to miss its turn. They speak of their day for having it two or three days beforehand.

Unfortunately our choice of records is not elevating. But I've noticed these points—a song of the ballad type with a good voice and well sung is appreciated, and is found necessary to vary rags and jass band music. Just now two old favorites are in demand: My Old Shako and The Deathless Army. Regimental band music too is popular. We have some Regimental Marches of English Regiments played by the Coldstream Guards. Kreisler's Caprice Viennese and Berceuse de Jocelyn (cello solo and also as a song) are popular too. American patriotic songs (of just now vogue) with harmonized refrains are very popular. In fact harmony in voices always gets home. A piece in minor key was very popular for a time, and is whistled quite a lot. What struck me about the whistling was that it was whistled with the proper flavour and mental effect of the minor key, almost giving one the feeling that they feel the harmony and had an accompaniment. The whistling seemed to be enjoyed by the whistler and was certainly pleasurable to listen to.

The amount of musical education and knowledge the Canadian has is very small. It is restricted to rags and jass music and one or two popular songs. They can't talk about music even in an elementary way, though they are tremendously keen on it. Most of our boys have seen all the possible London musical productions—some of which are quite good—Choo Choo Choo for instance. They want to sing, are willing to sing, but don't know at all how to use their voice. I wish I had time and opportunity to put some of the voices I hear into shape. I have had no opportunity here, though I started quite a few in England.

One thing I forgot to mention in connection with the telephonists. Word would be sent over the wires—last record—and on its conclusion all the buzzers at these stations would buzz then. Code signal for end of message. This is one of the little humorous touches of which this life is full.

I asked a fellow, about twenty-seven years of age, a Canadian, fond of poetry, well educated and who has led a fairly fast life, but who is quite a sensible and manly man what his impressions of Kreisler's Caprice Viennese was, on the spur of the moment, without having warned him I would ask him. Here is what he said, "It recalled to him a man struggling in life to get on; he reached his goal and climax and gradually felt himself losing grip of it."

If any of these observation and experiences are interesting to you, let me know, as everything out here is just common every day life, except the danger, which becomes common too.

I have been disappointed I have not been able to make deeper observations. Mostly everything musically I mean, I met in school life, the only peculiarity being that it just seems like First Year after Kindergarten to Third and Fourth Year.

I am hoping to apply for Y. M. C. A. work this winter, if things quiet down. Meanwhile I wouldn't be allowed to do this work. Kindest regards.

Yours sincerely, (Bombadier) Duncan McKenzie.

234, 476 10th Can. Siege Bk.

### MUSIC AND MANLINESS

By FRED G. SMITH, Fort Smith, Ark.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following letter will explain Mr. Smith's contribution.

*I enclose a note on Music and Manliness. I wrote it for the High School here. The boys' attitude towards music is inclined to be contemptuous so I hung the bulletin in the hall of the High School along with several prints of men musicians. The Principal was sympathetic and had the bulletin placed in a prominent position. Possibly you might like to print it in the M. S. J. as a help to other teachers.*

Are you one of those people who consider Music effeminate?

If so, do you know that:—

1. All the great *composers* were *men*.
2. The great Symphony Orchestras of the world are composed of *men players* and are conducted by *men*. The personnel of a modern Symphony Orchestra consists of 80 or 90 *men*.
3. Many *churches* in the larger cities have their music supplied by choirs of *men* and *boys* under a *male organist and director*.
4. The *men* who are playing and singing on the Concert stage and in Grand Opera have to be and are men of splendid physique and considerable intellectual attainment. They are the *physical equals* of the best football and baseball players.
5. "The Musical Quarterly" (New York) Oct. 1915, contains an article entitled "The American College Man in Music."

Definite information was obtained about 300 College men in music, but the list is admittedly incomplete.

6. *Music* is accepted as an entrance subject in many *American Colleges*.